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SUBJECT: Got Guerrillas? The Rise of the LCP in Brazil

¶1. (U) Summary: Following is an Embassy Brasilia translation of an article published in the March 26, 2008, edition of IstoE, a major Brazilian news magazine. The article reports that a violent leftist guerrilla organization operates in Rondonia state, Brazil, and in some ways resembles the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC). End Summary.

Begin Text

BRAZIL HAS GUERRILLAS  
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¶2. (U) ISTOE enters the base of the League of Poor Peasants (LCP), an armed group with 20 camps in three states, that has nine times more combatants than the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB) had in the Araguaia Guerrilla, and whose actions resulted in the death of 22 people last year.

¶3. (U) The noise of two gun shots broke the silence of the night in the peaceful rural community of Jacilandia, 38 kilometers away from the city of Buritis, state of Rondonia. It was a little bit past ten o'clock at night on the 22nd of February when three hooded men blocked the dirt road that connects this area of housing to the municipality, and coldly executed the farmer at point blank range. At 28 years of age, he fell over with 38 caliber shots in the nape of the neck. Ten hours after the crime, Garcia's body was still at the locale, spread out in the arms of his mother, Maria Tereza de Jesus, still waiting for the police. He was the youngest of her three sons. A month after the murder, the Chief of Police of Rondonia Iramar Goncalves, who investigates the case, concluded: "He was murdered by the LCP guerrillas."

¶4. (U) The acronym that the Police Chief referred to, with strange nonchalance, means Liga dos Camponeses Pobres (League of Poor Peasants), a radical organization of the extreme left that adopted armed struggle as a strategy to come to power in the country through "violent revolution." Paulo Roberto was the most recent victim of the LCP that, under the negligence of the federal authorities and the silence of the rest of Brazil, installed itself eight years ago in the region and is, at every hour, more violent. Just in 2007, the group's operations produced 22 victims - 18 farm workers or farm owners, and four partisans. Widely known in Rondonia, the members of the LCP control 500,000 hectares. They are spread out among thirteen bases that extend from Jaru, in the center of the state, to the outskirts of the state capital Porto Velho, stretching across to the border with Bolivia, in a region where they have just opened a road.

The purpose of the guerrillas would be to use the road as an escape route but, as long as neither the Federal Police nor the army bothers them, the clandestine trail is being called the trans-cocaine trail - over it, according to the local police, drugs, contraband and guerilla arms are smuggled.

#### PROHIBITED AREA

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15. (U) The government authorities don't have access to any of these settlements. Under the cover of "agrarian revolution," the LCP carries its battle flags against the bourgeoisie, imperialism, and large rural landholdings while its activists assault, torture, kill, and terrorize in rural cities and zones deep in the interior of Brazil. Hooded, armed with machine guns, pistols, grenades and AR-15, FAL, and AK-47 rifles, which are supposed to be for the exclusive use of the armed forces, they total almost nine times more combatants than the 60 militants of the Communist Party of Brazil who hid themselves away in the Amazon jungle in the beginning of the 70s during the legendary Araguaia Guerilla. "Colombia is here," says Police Chief Goncalves, in a reference to the FARC.

16. (U) IN THE HEART OF GUERRILLA TERRITORY Armed with an AR-15, a police officer enters into the heart of the territory dominated by the LCP and a barrier which prohibits access to the center of military training. "We can't see them but we are in their sights," a Rondonia State Police sergeant says to the IstoE team of reporters.

17. (U) The IstoE reporters entered into that prohibited area. The district of Jacinopolis, 450 kilometers from Porto Velho, is the heart of the guerrilla zone. According to the secret service of the

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Rondonia Military Police, that is where the training camp is. "Not even with 50 armed men do I have the courage to enter the area they invaded," the Police Chief admitted. To walk along the muddy, hostile dirt roads is like walking through a mine field. At any moment and with anyone that you might talk to, the fear of an ambush is constant. The activists have adopted the strategy of blocking the roads and of abducting people that transit through the area without a verbal safe-conduct pass granted by the LCP. "It is a way of combating the enemy forces," they wrote in one of the pamphlets that they distributed in the region. "These bandits were very well trained by the FARC guerrillas," reveals Major Eneidy Dias de Araujo, ex-police commander of the Military Police in Jaru, the city where the headquarters of the League is located.

18. (U) In order to get the so-called agrarian "revolution" going, according to the LCP documents that IstoE has had access to, the main activity of the group is to put into practice the so-called "revolutionary violence." And, for the local inhabitants, there has been cold and vengeful violence. In the case of its most recent victim, what the LCP did was a summary execution after internal judgment was brought on by suspicion as to the real purpose of the presence of Paulo Roberto Garcia in the region. "They believe that the young man was an agent that had infiltrated as a farmer and they had no scruples in executing him," the Police Chief said. Of the 22 deaths in 2007, four were farmers and fourteen were farm workers, which the League classifies as paramilitary. On the guerrilla side, four partisans were buried - murdered under different circumstances by hit men from the farms of the region.

19. (U) Besides killing, the LCP is accused by the police of burning homes, burning machines and equipment, and of devastating the Amazon forest. The residents in the community where Garcia lived don't know the meaning of class struggle or revolutionary parties, and much less what socialism is. But they know very well that, since the LCP has been around, there have been more deaths by killing than normal deaths.

#### SIGNS IN THE JUNGLE

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110. (U) The only ones who are able to openly pass through guerrilla territory are the clandestine lumber truckers that pay a

toll of R\$ 2,000 per day to the LCP to drive on the dirt roads controlled by the militia. In exchange for the toll, the guerillas provide armed security for the lumber smugglers so that they can rob trees from private property, conservation areas and Indian lands. These are lands that the LCP says that it has "taken" - and the verb "take," instead of "trespass" or "occupy," as the Landless Worker's Movement (MST) prefers, is not mere semantics, but a revelation of the bellicose nature of the group. "It is a failure of the Brazilian Army that allows these terrorists to occupy our border areas," Major Josenildo Jacinto do Nascimento blames. As the commander of the Environmental Military Police Battalion, Nascimento is deeply affected by the power and arrogance of that armed bandits.

¶11. (U) Last year, they tore apart an Environmental Police military base and abducted their soldiers. "The tactic used by the LCP for ambush is effective," admits one of the military police officers who was a prisoner for seven hours. "Because these are dirt roads, in the middle of the jungle, they cut down trees that block the roads. When people get out of their vehicles to move the logs, they are captured," says E. S., an Environmental Military Police officer, who prefers to remain anonymous in order to protect himself. "This war is a cancer that is spreading through the state," Nascimento warns.

¶12. (U) As can be seen in the League's pamphlets, the guerrillas post men at bases on the hilltops with binoculars and firecrackers to announce an "invasion" of their area by "enemy forces." After being closely monitored by motorcycle groups along the 38 kilometers that took us an hour and a half to travel across the LCP territory, we heard a volley of firecrackers announcing our presence. We were close to a base. The alert also serves the purpose of having armed men fan out into the jungle to occupy barricades set up around large trees near the camps.

#### DEATH IN THE CAMP

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¶13. (U) The farmer Garcia (on the right) was killed by two shots in the nape of the neck. "The guerrillas thought that he was an agent in the guerrilla area," Police Chief Iramar Goncalves said. The LCP leaders accused of the murder are Russo (on the left) and Caco, who remain at large.

¶14. (U) "The fact is that we cannot observe them, but we are in their sights," the Environmental Police military officer accompanying us warns. The truth is the Environmental Military Police is the only state force whose presence is tolerated by the guerrilla. The explanation is simple: With only eight agents to take care of almost 900,000 hectares in that region, they represent no threat to the group. On the contrary, they would be easy prey if the activists so desired.

#### THE BASE

¶15. (U) Right away the noise from the firecrackers reverberates throughout the immensity of the jungle, women and children put on their hoods and take their positions along the front line. When we get to the top of a hill, after passing through a barricade constructed with a huge tree trunk with the League's inscription on it, a red flag is seen flapping at the edge of a grouping of houses in the camp with thatched roofs. Just a little farther, another barricade and then we come to an obligatory stop. On the other side of the gate, the following dialogue took place with a raggedy dressed, hooded, and unsociable band.

- What have you come here for? - An angry, masked representative asked.
- We are journalists and we want to know what you all have to say about agrarian reform and the League of Poor Peasants.
- You can go now, we don't have anything to say. You only get in the way.
- How many families are in this camp?
- 300.

- May we speak with your leader?
- There is no leader here, we are all the same.
- Why are you masked?
- The mask is our identity.
- Do you believe that you can carry out a revolution?
- We don't have to answer to any bourgeoisie press.
- Who do you receive support from?
- None of your business.
- Can we enter into the camp?
- No way. Get out of here!

¶16. (U) With bullet proof vests on under our shirts, we left the camp gate out of a matter of safety. We drove back in our vehicle over the precarious road another hour and a half until the first LCP toll point. "Last year, we were taken prisoner by them, we were eight military policemen, and they were more than 50 men armed with machine guns," the police sergeant says. "There is just no way, to solve the problem with this band only a joint action by the army, federal police and state forces."

¶17. (U) TERROR Farm owner Sebastiao Conte (on the left) had his main building, tractors and management plan burned up. The guerrillas didn't even spare the Environmental Police post, which was destroyed. In the camps, they put children on the front line and they use hoods.

¶18. (U) Back from the area dominated by the LCP, it becomes obvious by the reserved conversations with the few residents that are willing to say something, that the terror disseminated by the guerrilla is measured by the silence of these country folk. The rebels control people's lives, besides investigating who is who in the region. Whoever does not "collaborate" with them - by providing money, livestock or a part of the production - becomes the target of cowardly attacks. Stories of farm workers in the area that were placed naked over ant hills, or beaten until they abandoned the area, are very much present in the minds of the residents. The torture carried out against rural workers make it difficult to hire manual labor in the region. "Nobody wants to work on my farm anymore," admits Sebastiao Conte, the owner of 30,000 hectares of land. He had part of his land "taken" two years ago by the LCP, and

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the main building was burned, as were his tractors, the worker housing and the forest management area. The farm owner, accused by the League of being a large rural property owner, is proof that the guerrilla terror is the same for everyone. According to him, over the last two years, he had to bury three of his hired hands. "All of them were murdered barbarously," Conte tells. "I am asking for help. I don't know who to turn to."

¶19. (U) Far from there, in the city of Cujubim, the rural workers that are employed on the farms can't walk around unarmed. "Around here, either you go armed, or you're dead," M.L. says. The farm foreman and his son have already lost count of all the times they have traded shots with the masked ones that tried to invade the farm. Treated as if they were paramilitary, the farm workers are favorite targets for attacks from the League, after the owners themselves. Nelson Elbrio, the manager of the Mutum Farm, had the bad luck of falling into the hands of the "organization." He was taken prisoner exactly like the Environmental Police military officers and remained a prisoner under the watchful eye of one of the armed men for six hours. "Right when I came around the curve in the dirt road I came face to face with fifteen hooded and heavily armed men. They pulled me out of the car and then I went through hell," Elbrio tells. "They wanted me to tell the secrets of the farm: How many people worked there, where the fuel tanks were, and if there was armed security." The worker's suffering went on until the end of the afternoon, when the group dragged him to the main building of the farm, shooting off a shotgun right next to his ears. Right after, they forced him to watch them burn the property and the tractors. "I never slept well after that," Elbrio said.

¶20. (U) With death at every step, fear has transformed entire districts into unpopulated zones - true ghost towns - and has created a mass of refugees from their own land, expelled by guerrillas. In Jacilandia, of the 25 wooden houses on the only

street in the town, only eight are occupied. Even the church closed its doors. "The people went away out of fear of the guerrillas," said one of the residents, and old man who only agreed to be interviewed anonymously. "Here, we can't say anything. To remain standing, you have to learn how to live," said the old farmer. The silence and the abandonment of the land are the hardest translation of this new way of living. Maria, the mother of the murdered farm worker, did not wait for the seventh day mass of her youngest offspring. She left her 100 hectares behind her, where she had 100 head of cattle and a recently built house. She left for an unknown place under the protection of other son.

#### THE SILENCE

121. (U) On that piece of land, the few that remain in spite of everything are faceless and nameless. When they are interrogated by the police during criminal investigations, they also become blind and deaf. "There is no witness to anything," complains Police Chief Goncalves. The reason why the police investigations are fruitless is because the insurgent prisoners are easily freed by the courts. "Because they employ the guerrilla tactic of using masks in their activities, we have our hands tied and cannot punish them. We never know who actually killed," the Police Chief complains. The only LCP leaders to go to jail because of murders were Wenderson Francisco dos Santos (nicknamed Russo) and Edilberto Resende da Silva (nicknamed Caco), who is at large. The two were accused of participating in the murder of the rural worker Antonio Martins, in 12003. Russo was absolved in trial court and the public prosecutors appealed the decision to the Superior Court of Justice.

#### FEAR OR CAUTION?

122. (U) "Not even with 50 armed men do I have the courage to enter and invade their territory," Police Chief Goncalves says.

123. (U) THE BRAZILIAN INTELLIGENCE AGENCY (ABIN) KNOWS This tension is the backdrop of a psychological war that the ideologues of the organization deem to be an ideal instrument so that the area will be abandoned by the farm owners. "The best way of having the area unoccupied is by destroying the large rural property," told us one of the masked men, called Luiz by a colleague. According to the logic of the LCP, the farm owners have

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to always lose money, or else they won't abandon the land. At the head of the 300 families that occupied the Catanio Farm, a 25,000 hectares property, partisan Luiz defends the confiscation of cattle to satisfy the hunger of the squatters and thinks that "taking over" the land is a legal way of carrying out an "agrarian revolution." "If we wait for the courts, then we'll wait here forever," he says.

124. (U) The LCP militants are so audacious that, last year, more than 200 of them marched hooded through the streets of the town of Buritis, 450 kilometers from Porto Velho, until they stopped at the gates of the police station, where they demanded the exit of Police Chief Goncalves from the district. The reason: He had arrested one of the leaders of the guerrilla faction. Not yet satisfied, the bandits beat on the doors of the Public Prosecution Office and of the courthouse demanding that the heads of these government bodies also step down. This was reported to the Ministry of Justice, to President Lula and to the state government. Until now, there has been no response. "Nobody takes our accusations seriously. They think that we are joking, that accusing guerrillas is something delirious," says the outraged Police Chief Goncalves. "This is going to end up in a tragedy of alarming proportions, and then the human rights defenders will show up," he criticizes. It is exactly because the accusations are not taken seriously on the part of the public prosecutors, judges and the military that the League gains strength and grows with impunity.

125. (U) As tragic as the terror that this armed group imposes on the rural communities is the fact that the state and federal governments know of the existence of this armed band - and don't do anything. According to the LCP Dossier, a confidential, 120-page



Rondonia police report, sent last December to the Brazilian Intelligence Agency (ABIN), to the Army, and the Ministry of Agrarian Reform, the armed group, besides committing every kind of barbarity, is financed by illegal loggers. According to the document, the LCP controls an area estimated at 500,000 hectares, where it indoctrinates more than 4,000 poor peasant families spread out among more than 20 agrarian reform camps variously placed in the states of Minas Gerais, Para, and Rondonia. "They are going against the grain of what is contemporary. But, in fact, they formed a 'parallel' state," says Oswaldo Firmo, a judge of law at the bench specialized in agrarian conflict in the state of Minas Gerais.

TASK FORCE

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¶26. (U) Documents in the possession of IstoE prove that federal government authorities have turned a deaf ear to the problem. On January 11, 2008, the Federal government agrarian ombudsperson, the Appellate Judge Gercino Jose da Silva Filho, received the accusations sent to him about the illegal activities committed by the League of Poor Peasants. Once again, nothing was done. "They say that they are aware of everything, but where is the action?" wonders Major Nascimento, the commander of the Environmental Military Police in Rondonia. "This situation here will only be solved together with other military forces," the major admits. That is what happened in the state of Para last November, during the so-called Peace in the Countryside Operation, when an action involving the Army, civil and military police, and federal police expelled LCP squatters that had occupied the Fourkilha Farm, in the southern part of the state. With two helicopters, 200 men and 40 police vehicles, the task force surrounded the area and arrested almost 150 militants and recovered a true war arsenal. "We need the iron hand of the state. Here we are treated as if we were marginal citizens," added the farm owner Sebastiao Conte.

End text.

¶27. Comment. IstoE is a left-of-center Brazilian newsweekly, third in national circulation, and while it is generally accurate and fair, its reporting is more uneven than that of circulation leader Veja. Neither the political section nor the regional affairs office had previously heard of the LCP, but the report is plausible given Brazil's size, the occasional appearance of rural criminals and guerrillas in the past, and the inaccessibility of remote areas.

SOBEL